

### **End of Mission Statement**

*Visit of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons to the Democratic Republic of the Congo*

30 May 2025

#### **I. Introduction**

**Kinshasa, 30 May 2025** - In my capacity as United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs), I have had the privilege to carry out an official visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 19 to 30 May 2025 at the invitation of the Government. This was the official third visit conducted by my mandate, following visits from my predecessors in 2008 and 2009, and the first visit by any Special Procedures mandate-holder since 2011. The purpose of my visit was to assess the human rights situation of IDPs throughout the country and make recommendations to the Government, the international community, and other stakeholders to improve the situation of IDPs, strengthen enjoyment of their rights, and address the root causes of displacement. In addition to Kinshasa, I traveled to the provinces of Ituri and North Kivu, including the municipalities of Maluku, Bunia, Beni, Goma, and Nyiragongo.

During my visit, I met with a wide range of Government officials, including the Prime Minister, the Vice-Prime Minister of the Interior, Security, Decentralization, and Customary Affairs, the Vice-Prime Minister of Planning and Coordination of Development Assistance, the Minister of State of Property Affairs, the Minister of Mines, the Minister of Human Rights, the Minister of Social Affairs the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Vice-Minister of Justice, representatives of the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Children, and the Military Governors of Ituri and North Kivu Provinces. I also met the President of the National Human Rights Commission and the Director-General of the National Fund for Reparations to Victims of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Crimes Against the Peace and Security of Humanity (FONAREV). In Goma, I met the *de facto* authorities that have exercised control over large parts of North and South Kivu since January 2025. Regarding the international community, I met the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and her deputies, the Humanitarian Country Team, and representatives of UN agencies, funds, and programmes at provincial level. I also held meetings with civil society and faith-based organizations working with IDPs and on human rights issues, as well as IDPs themselves in the areas I visited.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for extending an invitation to visit and for their openness to international scrutiny and willingness to engage in frank and constructive dialogue. I am also grateful to MONUSCO, in particular the Joint Human Rights Office, OCHA, UNHCR, and UNDP for their extensive support in preparing the substantive and logistical aspects of my visit, as well as to OHCHR in Geneva for the support provided to my mandate. Above all, I am grateful to the IDPs I met for taking the time to share their moving testimonies and express their needs, hopes, and aspirations for the future.

While my visit has been both informative and enlightening, it is clear that two weeks is not nearly enough to fully grasp the complexity and richness of the situation in a country as vast and multifaceted as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There is so much more to understand, and I leave with a strong sense of both humility and commitment to continued engagement. As such, this statement presents only the preliminary observations from my visit. My complete analysis and recommendations will be prepared in the coming months and presented to the Human Rights Council at its 62nd Session in June 2026.

## II. Context and background of internal displacement

The Democratic Republic of the Congo faces one of the world's largest, most protracted, and complex internal displacement crises. Armed conflict, intercommunal violence, disasters and natural resource governance challenges have collectively driven over 7 million internally displaced people from their homes, putting the DRC among the top five countries in the world in terms of the overall number of internally displaced persons.

Armed conflict has intensified and escalated the displacement situation in recent years. Beginning in 2022, the March 23 Movement (M23), now part of the broader Congo River Alliance (AFC), has expanded its effective control over large swathes of North and South Kivu, including the provincial capitals of Goma and Bukavu, with the systematic support of the Rwandan Defence Forces (RDF), ostensibly in order to root out the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a non-State armed group comprised of former elements of the Rwandan regime responsible for the Rwandan genocide. The AFC/M23 advance has engendered massive displacement as civilians flee to areas under Government control or from fighting between the Rwandan-backed AFC-M23 and the Congolese Army (FARDC), supported by *Wazalendo* militias, non-State armed groups allied with the Government, some of which purportedly contain FDLR elements. Collectively, North and South Kivu, the epicentre of this conflict, accounted for half of all internal displacement in the country.

Other armed conflicts that have led to significant displacement include conflict between the FARDC, supported by the Ugandan army, against the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), an Islamist group of Ugandan origin operating in western Uganda as well as the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri. In Ituri, violent clashes between rival non-State armed groups Zaire/Self-Defence for Victim Communities in Ituri (Zaire/ADCVI) and the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo/Union of Revolutionaries for the Defense of the Congolese People (CODECO/URDPC), as well as between these groups and the State, have also created mass displacement across the province, and contributed to the declaration of martial law in Ituri Province.

Intercommunal violence is another major driver of displacement across the country. These conflicts frequently start as disputes over land use or ownership, which take on an ethnic dimension given the close ties between land and ethnic identity in the country. As communities factionalize around the parties in dispute, these disputes can devolve into violent clashes if one faction takes up arms, resulting in a vicious circle as rival groups arm themselves in the interest of so-called "self-defense". Such violence can quickly spiral to the level of armed conflict, as may be seen in the CODECO/URDPC-Zaire/ADCVI conflict, which has its roots in land conflicts between the pastoralist Hema and agricultural Lendu ethnic

groups. Other intercommunal conflicts that have led to significant displacement include conflict between the Mbole and Lengola communities over a disputed land deal in Tshopo Province, and the conflict between Teke and Yaka communities in the western provinces of Mai-Ndombé, Kwango, Kwilu, and periurban areas of Kinshasa, which began as a dispute over an increase in customary taxes for land use levied by the Teke, who were traditional landowners in the area, and the Yaka, who were permitted to practice agriculture on Teke lands in exchange for paying customary taxes, but has since evolved into a situation resembling organized criminal violence.

In Eastern DRC, intercommunal violence and its impacts on displacement are closely intertwined with the AFC-M23 conflict. FARDC forces deployed to Ituri in the context of the imposition of martial law to quell the activities of non-State armed groups have been redeployed to combat the AFC-M23 in the Kivus, creating a security vacuum that the Zaire/ADCVI and CODECO/URPDC militias have leveraged to expand their activities in Ituri. The Zaire/ADCVI group has reportedly pursued rapprochement and strategic cooperation with the AFC-M23 against the FARDC, moving beyond its origins as an ethnic self-defense group in apparent support of the AFC-M23's broader territorial aspirations.

In addition to driving intercommunal conflict, unresolved land rights issues have also led to displacement in the context of conservation projects and extractive industries. Fortress conservation models applied in protected areas such as the Kahuzi-Biega National Park have led to the forced eviction of Indigenous Batwa communities without their free, prior, and informed consent. Indigenous Peoples have contributed to the sustainable management of these lands for generations yet have been deprived of access to their cultural heritage, traditional livelihoods, place of spiritual significance, and subjected to cultural assimilation. At the same time, they face discrimination in terms of access to essential services, including education and healthcare and access to other forms of employment.

Both Indigenous Peoples and other Congolese citizens also face forced evictions in the context of extractive activities. The DRC holds vast reserves of cobalt, copper, gold, and coltan, critical transition minerals which are in high demand globally. Under Congolese law, the right to mineral resources takes precedence over land rights, meaning that those who reside on lands beneath which mineral resources are discovered can legally be evicted without their consent. Although in principle, those granted the rights to exploit mineral resources should negotiate with affected communities and provide for the resettlement of those displaced, this is not always respected in practice, an issue exacerbated by corruption and the uneven enforcement of these rights, and the granting of mineral concessions by the Government to foreign companies, who may not understand or abide by their obligations to affected communities. Non-State armed groups also clash with one another as well as with the State for control over lucrative mineral resources, which can also drive displacement.

Disaster displacement is also a significant and increasingly prevalent issue. The DRC is prone to a wide range of natural hazards, including flooding, landslides, and volcanic eruptions. In 2024, disasters triggered at least 750,000 displacements, making it the second-highest year on record for disaster displacement in the country. Heavy rains in 2024 and 2025 have led to significant flooding and related displacement throughout the country, including in Kinshasa, Tshopo, and Tanganyika. These disasters impacted IDPs already displaced by conflict and violence in Ituri, North and South Kivu, and Tanganyika,

displacing them anew after their shelters were destroyed and, in some cases, preventing the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Taken together, these dynamics paint a picture of the serious and multifaceted displacement crisis confronting the DRC. This underscores the need for a comprehensive, well-resourced, and fully implemented legal and policy framework with a clear delineation of roles and responsibilities to ensure equitable protection, assistance, and durable solutions for internally displaced persons, as well as prevent future displacement and address the human rights challenges confronting IDPs.

### III. Human rights of internally displaced persons

At the outset, I would like to express how deeply moved I was by the testimonies shared with me by internally displaced persons across the country. Despite the dire living conditions that many are facing and the horrific human rights violations many have suffered, I was touched by the simplicity and dignity of their demands. They shared their hopes for safety, security, and the opportunity to resume their livelihoods in order to rebuild their lives with self-reliance. Their resilience in the face of such adversity and their unwavering desire not for handouts, but for a chance to live in peace and provide for their families, left a profound impression on me.

#### *Protection risks*

IDPs who have fled armed conflict and violence across the country, including those in North and South Kivu, Ituri, Kwango, Kwilu, and Mai-Ndombé, face serious threats to their lives, dignity, liberty, and security. This includes murder, summary executions, enforced disappearances, and indiscriminate attacks, perpetrated principally by non-State armed groups, including the AFC/M23, the Mobondo militia, Zaire/ADCVI, CODECO/URPDC, but also armed groups affiliated with the State, including the *Wazalendo* militias operating in North and South Kivu. FARDC elements also reportedly engaged in such practices, although not as a systematic practice. Customary chiefs are particularly targeted by murder and summary executions, both by the Mobondo and the AFC/M23, as part of a strategy to establish a parallel administration regarding housing, land, and property rights. The civilian and humanitarian nature of IDP camps has been violated in Ituri and the Kivus by armed actors, resulting in the effective use of these camps as shields. In Ituri, the Zaire/ADCVI and CODECO/URPDC, and other militias have members embedded in multiple IDP camps, while in the Kivus, the FARDC and affiliated *Wazalendo* groups have taken up military positions in close proximity to IDP camps, exposing them to attacks. FARDC forces have also conducted military raids on IDP camps in Ituri Province to root out suspected militants, with detrimental impacts on civilian residents. IDPs in conflict-affected areas as well as returnees to formerly conflict-affected areas face protection risks from unexploded ordnance present in these areas.

IDPs have also been exposed to serious offenses against their dignity, and physical, mental, and moral integrity. The scourge of sexual violence remains a persistent feature of conflict in the DRC, and displaced women and girls across the country face rape, sexual exploitation—including survival sex—and physical violence, with little access to hygiene, medical care, or psychosocial support. Communities living in the vicinity of mining concessions have also reportedly been subjected to sexual violence as part of a

strategy to force their displacement from these lands. Non-State armed groups including the AFC/M23, the Mobondo, CODECO/URPDC and Zaire/ADCVI militias, as well as State-affiliated *Wazalendo* groups have been the lead perpetrators of these abuses, although FARDC elements have also faced such accusations at lesser scale. IDPs have also been subjected to contemporary forms of slavery. Forced recruitment by non-State armed groups is prevalent across the country, and IDPs - including children - are particularly vulnerable. In areas controlled by the AFC/M23, the pre-existing practice of *Salongo* or mandatory group community service has been repurposed to a form of forced labour in which communities are forced to construct infrastructure necessary for mining activities.

Every IDP has the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose their place of residence, but this right has not been upheld for many displaced Congolese. In areas controlled by the AFC/M23, all IDPs have been ordered to return to their areas of origin, regardless of their willingness or ability to do so safely and with dignity, violating their right to protection from forcible returns and prohibitions on forcible transfer of civilians under international humanitarian law. All IDP camps have been dismantled, and while some collective IDP sites remain, these are under a tight deadline to close as well. IDPs attempting to exercise their right to freedom of movement in order to seek safety have faced arbitrary arrest and detention at the hands of State security forces and *de facto* authorities. In Western DRC, displaced persons recounted being arrested by State security forces for allegedly disturbing public order by reporting their displacement. In areas under the control of the AFC/M23, IDPs who are unable or unwilling to comply with orders to return to their areas of origin are also reportedly subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention under brutal detention conditions. IDPs at risk of forced recruitment, including young men and boys, may also confine themselves to avoid recruitment. Most IDPs in conflict-affected areas also face restrictions on movement outside of a defined radius, due to pockets of uncontrolled armed group activity in the surrounding areas.

In terms of equality and non-discrimination, IDPs in conflict settings are vulnerable to stigmatization on suspicion of their association with armed actors, an issue that is compounded by the instrumentalization of ethnicity in many land-related conflicts. Certain displaced populations also face additional discrimination, including Indigenous Peoples, whose nomadic lifestyle limits official recognition of their displacement; humanitarian aid delivery is also not always culturally or physically accessible to them, as they may live in separate communities. Indigenous Peoples are also disproportionately affected by conservation-induced displacement, and by extractive projects. Other groups that face particular affectation are older persons and persons with disabilities, whom I observed do not systematically receive adapted protection and assistance to address their specific needs. People with leprosy are also adversely impacted by conflict and displacement, as they are not only stigmatized but also face disruption to their healthcare, which can worsen symptoms of their illness. People with albinism and persons suspected of practicing witchcraft may also face heightened stigmatization in displacement.

#### *Living standards and access to assistance*

All IDPs have the right to an adequate standard of living, inclusive of essential food and potable water, basic shelter and housing, and access to essential medical services, provided by the competent authorities. However, few if any IDPs enjoy these rights in practice. Across the country, IDPs and the organizations working with them related the appalling conditions under which most IDPs are obliged to

survive, and I witnessed such conditions firsthand in my visits to IDP sites. There is an alarming shortage of food, clean water and sanitation services, shelter, and access to basic healthcare. Children—particularly those from Indigenous communities—are suffering from acute malnutrition. Overcrowding is a persistent issue, both for IDPs in camps and for the many IDPs across the country who live with host families, and this risks sparking social tensions as well as leading to the spread of communicable diseases. Many IDPs are also invisible to humanitarian providers, as they are sheltering with host families, making it difficult for aid providers to reach them; this is particularly the case in areas under the control of the AFC/M23 where displaced persons have been ordered to return home and those that do not do so face protection risks.

Access to healthcare is a particular challenge. Health facilities are limited throughout the country and often underfunded or financially inaccessible to internally displaced persons. In the Kivus, health workers and those seeking healthcare have also come under attack, and health facilities have been looted or pillaged by the AFC/M23 and *Wazalendo* militias. Across the country, there are frequent stockouts of essential medicines and supplies, a lack of hygiene kits for women and girls, and limited clinical services for survivor of sexual violence. Women face risks of sexual violence as they are obliged to travel long distances to access healthcare, and many are forced to give birth outside of medical settings, leading to a sharp rise in maternal and child mortality for displaced persons. While the trauma of those displaced by conflict and violence is immeasurably extensive, there is very little if any psychological and psychosocial care available to displaced persons.

Education for children has also been disrupted by displacement. Primary education is nominally free, yet many displaced persons cannot pay the costs associated with education, including for textbooks, materials and uniforms, or for education beyond the primary level. Schools in and around areas where people are displaced are overcrowded and may be difficult to access. As a result, many children and youth have been out of school since their displacement, limiting their prospects for an improved future at such a time as their displacement might end, and leaving them subject to negative coping mechanisms including recruitment by armed groups, petty criminality, survival sex, and early marriage.

The overall humanitarian situation is compounded by the inability of displaced formerly self-sufficient agricultural and pastoral communities to safely access their land, deepening food insecurity and economic strain. Most IDPs reported receiving limited support for alternative livelihoods, leaving them dependent on dwindling humanitarian assistance. However, this situation is increasingly untenable given dramatic cuts in humanitarian assistance owing to the cessation of foreign aid delivery by the United States of America, previously the DRC's largest bilateral donor and responsible for 70% of all humanitarian assistance provided to the country. The redirection of humanitarian resources toward the situation in North and South Kivu has also disadvantaged those displaced outside of this context. On the other hand, those in North and South Kivu are particularly affected by the cutoff on banking services imposed by the Government, which has created a massive liquidity crisis affecting civilians and humanitarian aid providers. Civilians cannot access their own salaries or savings without first crossing the border to Rwanda to withdraw money, an option not accessible to those further from the border, and one that comes with significant transfer loss as funds withdrawn must be converted from Rwandan to Congolese francs. The closure of Goma Airport has also disrupted humanitarian supply chains.

### *Durable solutions*

Promoting development and durable solutions to internal displacement takes on a new urgency given the increasing insufficiency of humanitarian assistance, but these efforts have also been curtailed because of the reduction in international assistance. I met beneficiaries of durable solutions interventions who had moved back on a path towards self-reliance with support to access quality housing and livelihoods, but funding constraints prevented these programmes from being extended to other displaced persons. Some IDP returnees in North and South Kivu have been able to return to their lands and successfully reclaim them. However, other IDP returnees report finding their lands have been occupied, allegedly by claimants of Rwandan origin, leaving them with neither a pathway to return nor the option to remain in displacement given orders issued by the *de facto* authorities, leaving them with few options for durable solutions.

Access to documentation and participation in public affairs are essential to enable durable solutions, but these remain critical challenges for displaced persons in the DRC. Many lack civil documentation either because it has been lost or destroyed during displacement, and face challenges in recovering this during displacement. This is particularly true for Indigenous persons, who may face additional difficulties in proving their identity. Lack of documentation may prevent them from effectively exercising their electoral rights or accessing essential services. IDPs and other victims of conflict and violence are chronically underrepresented in decision-making fora related to decisions that affect them across the country, including those related to the planning of humanitarian assistance, and are almost completely excluded from ongoing national and international peace processes. Displaced persons also face challenges in terms of freedom of expression; some have been arrested or harassed by State security forces for drawing attention to their situations of displacement, while in areas under AFC/M23 control, journalists and human rights defenders have reportedly been subjected to targeted attacks and forced into displacement.

Unresolved housing, land, and property issues remain at the core of many internal displacement issues. Under the country's land tenure system, all land is owned by the State, the only entity legally capable of granting land concessions. Local authorities can grant land concessions up to a certain size, while larger land concessions must be granted at Ministerial or Parliamentary level. However, there is also a parallel traditional land tenure system among different communities, overseen by customary chiefs who are able to resolve land-related disputes. Although in principle, the State is the sole authority over land allocation, customary claims play a significant role in practice, particularly in areas where trust in the customary system may be higher and/or where the State's presence is more limited. There is also tension between the land rights framework and the mineral rights framework, as above-ground land rights and below-ground mineral rights within the same allotment may be granted to different parties. In such situations, the parties granted mineral rights are meant to provide for the resettlement and rehabilitation of land claimants that may be displaced as a result of extractive activities, but this requirement is not always respected in practice.

This results in a system of often overlapping and contradictory land claims, which is the source of many conflicts and related displacement. Navigating the formal legal system for land rights requires time and resources, and as such, more powerful interests are often able to legally displace those who cannot afford or do not know how to use the system. The land tenure system also frustrates efforts to provide protection and assistance to internally displaced persons, as those with land rights may charge for the use

of their lands as displacement sites. It can also problematize durable solutions, as displaced persons returning to their lands may find those lands have been occupied by others. This has been cited by many interlocutors as a particular issue in North and South Kivu, where many customary chiefs have been summarily executed and/or replaced by the *de facto* authorities; these chiefs then re-allocate land belonging to displaced persons to others.

Finally, access to justice is key to enabling durable solutions, yet remains out of reach for many IDPs. The legal system is challenging for many IDPs to navigate without external assistance and requires an investment of time and resources that many are unable to make, as court cases can carry on for long period. Victims also fear reprisal for bringing forward cases, and there is no system in place to protect against this. Many also do not wish to engage with the system, given perceptions of corruption and impunity enjoyed by perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses. There are also tensions created by the competing and overlapping legal systems in place, particularly around issues related to land and property disputes, which mean that legal cases in these instances may not be easily resolved.

#### IV. National responses and responsibility

I would like to recognize the Government's efforts to address internal displacement despite the highly challenging circumstances they are facing given the violations of their sovereignty and territorial integrity by the Rwandan-backed AFC/M23. The Government's recognition of the humanitarian crisis is a vital first step — and the invitation extended to my mandate to engage with the situation on the ground is a meaningful gesture, as are the efforts the DRC has undertaken to raise the profile of this crisis as a member of the Human Rights Council. Yet, what has emerged clearly is that this is not merely a localized or regional conflict. While I recognize the particular challenges confronting the DRC in North and South Kivu, I must emphasize that internal displacement is an issue that warrants the Government's attention even beyond these areas. The roots of the internal displacement crisis in the DRC are deeply intertwined with disputes over land, unresolved intercommunal tensions, the weak or limited presence of the State in many areas, and competing political agendas. These dynamics drive internal displacement throughout the country, including conflict-related displacement as well as displacement linked to land management issues, and have also contributed to displacement in North and South Kivu. I strongly urge the Government to ensure equal focus and investment on all displacement crises, in addition to the displacement crisis in North and South Kivu.

Too often, the burden of response is seen as the responsibility of humanitarian actors alone, and some Government stakeholders have posited in our meetings that international support should be the primary vehicle for ensuring protection, assistance, and solutions for internally displaced persons, given that the Government's efforts are focused on regaining sovereignty over its territory in the East. But sovereignty also brings with it responsibility — to all citizens and residents, including internally displaced persons. The current international attention provides a critical opportunity for the DRC to demonstrate its leadership. The Government must not only reaffirm its commitment to sovereignty but also assume leadership in protecting and supporting all those affected by internal displacement, including those displaced as a result of external aggression or the actions of armed groups, who retain the same rights as other Congolese residents. Particularly given the decline in international assistance, the Government can no longer afford to outsource its responsibilities towards internally displaced persons and must take the lead



in ensuring coordinated, accountable responses to internal displacement with the support of the international community. In this regard, national initiatives such as the Fund for National Solidarity and the Humanitarian Management of Disasters, which provides assistance to displaced persons and other victims of conflict and disasters, must be strengthened and scaled. Disaggregated data on conflict, displacement, and human rights violations is crucial to informed policymaking in these domains but remains a major gap in terms of State capacity, with many interlocutors informing me that they relied primarily on UN data for such figures. I would urge the authorities to invest in developing their own capacities for data collection in these areas in the interest of long-term sustainability.

In terms of legal frameworks for protection, assistance, and solutions for internally displaced persons, I welcome the adoption of relevant legislation, including ratification of the Kampala Convention in 2014. I am also encouraged by efforts to develop additional relevant legal and policy frameworks, including a disaster risk reduction framework aligned to the Sendai Framework. It is incumbent upon the Government to ensure these frameworks are put into practice, with a clear delegation of roles and responsibilities for their implementation and oversight arrangements to ensure compliance by all stakeholders. To that end, I recommend the full and expedited domestication of the Kampala Convention, with a permanent coordination body established to ensure the full implementation of the law in practice.

I welcome the ongoing development of a law on transitional justice and would urge the Government to ensure this law covers all aspects of transitional justice, including truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-recurrence. I am also encouraged by efforts to document human rights violations in order to ensure accountability under the Ministry of Justice and the National Commission of Human Rights; however, I was primarily informed of such efforts in the context of the conflict in North and South Kivu. While this is necessary, such efforts must be extended to ensure accountability for violations in other contexts, including human rights violations and abuses that have occurred during conflicts in Ituri, Mai-Ndombé, Kwango, Kwilu, and Tshopo Provinces. I welcome the urgently needed establishment of FONAREV as a resource to help combat impunity and ensure the remediation of victims, and urge that its mandate be respected and appropriately resourced, without placing undue demands upon the organization to provide humanitarian assistance or engage in other assistance activities that fall outside the remit of transitional justice.

Effectively addressing internal displacement requires addressing the legal framework for land tenure that underlies many intercommunal conflicts. To that end, I welcome efforts to update the 1973 Land Law and formalize the role of customary chiefs in relation to land-related issues. I would also urge more systematic oversight of compliance with existing land-related frameworks, including frameworks related to legal and customary land rights and mineral rights. Such compliance monitoring should focus on preventing arbitrary displacement, particularly of Indigenous communities and communities affected by extractive projects and ensure that the relocation of communities displaced in these contexts is achieved through their full and informed participation, their free, prior, and informed consent, and results in improved standards of living for affected communities, as provided for in these legal frameworks. I would also recommend the establishment of a clearer system for regulating and resolving land-related conflicts, including those resulting from the application of parallel frameworks. It is also crucial to ensure allocation of land by the State at all authority levels is subject to impact assessment to evaluate and address potential

conflicts and address competing claims. I look forward to learning more about the Government's efforts to undertake land reforms. I would also encourage the development of a business and human rights policy that addresses the displacement impact of commercial activities, including extractive industries, as a complementary framework.

In terms of ensuring equality and preventing discrimination, I welcome the adoption of relevant legislation in 2022 including the Law on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Law on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. However, more must be done to put this legislation into practice in the context of internal displacement. During my visit, I observed that humanitarian responses frequently do not cater for the needs of persons with disabilities, with limited measures in place to ensure they receive protection and assistance adapted to their specific needs. With regard to Indigenous Peoples, I learned they are often invisible in displacement situations due to their nomadic lifestyle and was disturbed in some of my discussions with authorities to hear paternalistic rhetoric regarding Indigenous People, painting them as backwards and suggesting they should assimilate into majority culture. Although the 2022 Law stipulates that Indigenous Peoples must provide their free, prior, and informed consent before any relocation or project impacting their lands, territories, and resources, I was informed that these measures are frequently not respected in practice. I urge the Government to do more in this regard, including by complying with the ruling of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights which found that the rights of Indigenous residents of what is now the Kahuzi-Biega National Park had been violated and calling for compensation, a formal apology, and the formalization of their land rights.

The absence of the State as an actor providing effective security and governance is at the heart of conflict-related displacement throughout the country. While I welcome decentralization efforts to support grassroots development led by the Ministry of the Interior and efforts to increase State presence at the territorial level carried out by the Ministry of Plan, including the "145 Territories" initiative and local governance projects in conflict-prone provinces under the Peacebuilding Fund, these must be expedited and appropriately resourced. Re-establishing security in particular is critical to enable displaced persons to access their lands and resources to remain self-reliant and eventually achieve durable solutions to their displacement. Efforts in this regard must focus not only on the East but on other situations of displacement that have been comparatively neglected, including the situation in Mai-Ndombé, Kwango, and Kwilu where many displaced persons report that security services have not been responsive to incidents impacting them. Grassroots community protection initiatives, such as local security committees established by the Ministry of the Interior, can also play a role in re-establishing security. The State should also work to strengthen institutional protection capacities and community-based protection, including local human rights and protection monitoring, an expanded role for the State in protecting conflict-affected civilians, and respecting the civilian nature of IDP sites. In this regard, it is also important to ensure that security forces, including the FARDC, receive training on their human rights obligations. Additionally, women's protection and empowerment is crucial given the scale of conflict-related sexual violence across the country. I hope to learn more about the Government's efforts to address conflict-related sexual violence in a holistic manner and encourage the implementation of programmes that strengthen the economic empowerment and self-reliance of survivors.

Given the aspirations of IDPs to regain self-reliance and limited viability of dependence on humanitarian aid in the long-term, the Government must also work to strengthen pathways to development and self-reliance for displaced persons as enablers of durable solutions to internal displacement. In this regard, I welcome efforts to lead a transition from humanitarian to development approaches implemented by the Ministry of Planning, through local development plans in areas affected by displacement. There is also an urgent need to expand social services, including access to education and healthcare, with a particular emphasis on maternal and child health services, clinical care for survivors of sexual violence, and psychological and psychosocial care. The State should also strengthen access to economic services, including banking and livelihoods support services including finance, vocational training, and business development services. It is also imperative to resolve the liquidity crisis in North and South Kivu, as the current cutoff of banking services is imposing undue hardship on the civilian population and impeding relief efforts. It would also be important to find ways to promote resilience and strengthen the self-reliance of displacement-affected populations in North and South Kivu, given that many are no longer able to depend on humanitarian assistance. In line with its obligations under the Kampala Convention, the State should also work towards the development and implementation of national and local durable solutions strategies informed by the participation of internally displaced persons in their full diversity.

Peace is a critical enabler for durable solutions, and I am encouraged by the efforts undertaken by the Government in this regard, including local conflict-resolution efforts spearheaded by the Ministry of the Interior and international peace processes with the AFC/M23 and Rwanda to end the conflict in North and South Kivu. However, the DRC has a long history of peace processes, negotiations, and dialogues. However, a consistent thread throughout these efforts is a lack of trust — between communities, between citizens and the state, and in the very institutions tasked with delivering justice. Many agreements remain unfulfilled, ceasefires incomplete, and core grievances unaddressed.

The current peace efforts — including at least five parallel negotiations — must do more to include affected populations, including internally displaced persons and tackle the structural drivers of violence. This includes promoting social cohesion between communities impacted by conflict and ensuring the disarmament, demobilization, and meaningful reintegration of combatants and in this regard, I would urge the expansion of the work of the P-DDRCS, including incentives to mobilize the engagement of a broader swathe of combatants and end efforts to address the instrumentalization of ethnicity and hate speech. The Government must also end its support to and partnerships with non-State armed groups engaged in violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, notably the *Wazalendo* militias, to ensure the protection of the population and undertake efforts to restore its monopoly on violence by working to decrease the proliferation of arms throughout the country, which contributes to the escalation of violent conflicts. At the international level, the Government must pursue confidence-building measures and engage at an appropriate level in good-faith negotiations with the AFC/M23 and Rwanda to bring about a negotiated solution to the conflict.

Lastly, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and international humanitarian law also apply to non-State actors effectively controlling territory when this affects internally displaced persons, without prejudice as to those groups' legal status. The AFC/M23 - and other armed groups exercising control over their territory - must ensure in their conduct of hostilities that they fully uphold the rights of

internally displaced persons, including to protection and assistance, freedom of movement, and the right to a safe, voluntary, and dignified solution. They should also abide by their obligations to facilitate the unimpeded humanitarian assistance, provided in line with the humanitarian principles of impartiality and humanity without discrimination, in the interest of the civilian population in areas under their control. Journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society organizations must also be allowed to carry out their essential work in these areas.

#### V. Role of the international community

The DRC is of vital strategic importance to the overall peace and stability of the African continent, and the international community must remain engaged to support the country's efforts to address internal displacement and build sustainable peace. To that end, I welcome the efforts of regional and international partners to broker a negotiated solution to the conflict in North and South Kivus.

As MONUSCO continues to contend with a reduced presence and the prospect of an eventual drawdown, I would urge efforts to strengthen national and local capacity to address internal displacement, through training and supporting national and provincial authorities to address internal displacement, investing in sustainable early warning and community protection mechanisms and local conflict mediation capacities, focusing on low-impact high-yield initiatives such as human rights monitoring, building local partnerships, and transitioning responsibilities to national authorities, peacebuilding, and development actors. These efforts should prioritize areas where State capacity is weakest and where displacement and protection risks are most serious.

In light of prevailing funding conditions and the urgent need to transition from humanitarian towards development approaches, UN agencies, funds, and programmes as well as national and international civil society should support durable solutions programming, including by planning responses to new and ongoing displacement that adopt a "Solutions from the Start perspective". Such efforts should focus on building the resilience of displacement-affected communities and strengthening access to employment and livelihoods, while advocating with and building the capacity of national actors to provide long-term safety and security, resolve housing, land, and property issues, ensure access to documentation, and facilitate access to justice.

In line with the UN Charter, Rwanda must cease its support to armed groups and refrain from further violations of the DRC's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Both Rwanda and the AFC/M23 must also engage in good faith to bring about a negotiated end to the conflict in North and South Kivu. The international community should also work to curtail illicit financial flows that have resulted from the seizure of the DRC's mineral resources by non-State armed groups and the transfer of these resources through Rwanda, including where necessary through the enactment of targeted sanctions on individuals and businesses engaged in supply chain.

#### VI. Conclusions

As my mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo comes to a close, I am left with a profound sense of both urgency and opportunity. Over the course of this visit, I have witnessed the remarkable resilience of communities affected by conflict, the determination of women and youth to reclaim their futures, and the quiet but persistent hope that peace is still possible — even in the most difficult circumstances.

The DRC stands at a crossroads. The challenges are immense — but so too is the potential for transformation. This mission has reaffirmed that peace is not merely the absence of war, but the presence of justice, opportunity, and dignity for all. To the Congolese people: I would like to say that your strength and perseverance are not invisible. To the government: this is your moment to lead with courage, to listen, and to act. To the international community: solidarity must be matched with sustained and increased support, with the leadership from the government.